United Nations A/AC.183/PV.234

General Assembly

Official Records

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

234th Meeting
Monday, 1 December 1997, 10.30 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Ka ..... (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): Today the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is holding a solemn meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

It is my pleasure and honour to welcome Mr. Hennadiy Y. Udovenko, President of the General Assembly; Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations; Mr. Fernando Berrocal Soto, President of the Security Council; Mr. Herman Leonard de Silva, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine; and Mr. Alvaro de Soto, Assistant Secretary-General, Department of Political Affairs. I wish also to welcome representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, as well as members of the press and all those who have accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this solemn meeting.

I would now like to invite everyone present to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of all those who have given their lives for the cause of the Palestinian people and the return of peace in the region.

The participants observed a minute of silence.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): Please allow me at this point to make a statement on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

We have gathered here today for the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This year the observance has special meaning as we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, by which the General Assembly decided to divide Palestine into two States, one Arab and one Jewish, with a special international status for the city of Jerusalem.

Half a century later the Arab State of Palestine still has not been established. Of the estimated 7 million Palestinians living today, about half are still refugees, more than 1 million of whom live in camps, under tents, and many others have chosen to reside in neighbouring countries. Furthermore, many of the Palestinians scattered around the world are no longer considered refugees and cannot return to their own country.

Another sad date in the history of the Palestinian people was observed in June of this year: the thirtieth anniversary of the Six Day War, which resulted in the occupation by the Israeli forces of all the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Although since 1993 the launching of the peace process has made it possible for Israeli troops to withdraw from parts of the West Bank and Gaza, the land area that

97-86617 (E)

This record contains the original texts of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one week of the date of publication*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued in a corrigendum.

is now actually under Palestinian administration is only a small part of the territory occupied in 1967. This area is divided into several non-contiguous zones that are subject to periodic military closures and where the free movement of persons and goods gives rise to daily harassment and provocations by the occupation troops. The remainder of the territory in which the Palestinian people live is still under partial or total occupation and is at the mercy of the actions the occupying forces decide to take, such as land confiscation, the expansion of existing settlements and the building of new ones, the destruction of homes, searches, closures, collective punishments, and so on. Arab East Jerusalem remains under occupation and separated from the West Bank of the River Jordan, and it has seen its demographic composition totally altered by the measures to Judaize the city.

Is it acceptable that, 50 years after the adoption of the resolution partitioning Palestine and on the threshold of the next millennium, the international community continues to tolerate this situation of dispossession and this refusal to recognize the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people? The commemoration of the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People must be more than a ritual. It must be an opportunity for us to reflect on the past and on the sufferings and hardships of the Palestinian people and for assessing what needs to be done to put an end to the pain of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Does not your presence here today bear witness that the United Nations Member States are not indifferent to these realities and to the question of Palestine?

In spite of the efforts made over several decades, not only by the United Nations but also by the many non-governmental organizations represented here, the situation in Palestine remains worrisome because of the impasse in the negotiations between the parties. The overwhelming majority by which the General Assembly — two weeks ago, during its tenth emergency special session — adopted a resolution outlining concrete measures to be taken gives hope that the international community is truly determined to find a just solution to the Palestinian crisis. The members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People were disappointed to hear the representative of the Israeli Government describe that General Assembly session as a masquerade and to realize that he had obviously not understood why the building of settlements and other actions taken by his country are of such serious concern to the international community.

Since 1967 the international community has continued to object to the building of settlements and to all other actions of the occupying Power to alter the legal status, physical character and demographic composition of the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. The establishment of settlements, the confiscation of land and the appropriation of natural resources are clearly incompatible with the principle of land for peace, because these actions are aimed at placing under permanent Israeli authority vast amounts of the resources of the Palestinian territory.

The Security Council has adopted numerous resolutions stating that such actions are in violation of international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention and declaring them null and void. The General Assembly and other United Nations organs, as well as several intergovernmental bodies — the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement — have taken the same position on the question as the Security Council.

We thus appeal urgently to the Israeli Government not to isolate itself but to pay heed to the voice of reason and the voice of the international community, as well as that of its own people and that of the Palestinian people.

Recent events have clearly demonstrated that the peace process is increasingly fragile, deadlocked and even in jeopardy. For instance, the transition period provided for in the Declaration of Principles has lasted almost four years now and negotiations are stalled in almost every area. It is absolutely crucial that the situation not be allowed to stagnate further. In particular, the sponsors of the accords should be urged to undertake new initiatives and, above all, confidence-building measures to save and revitalize the peace process.

Today more than ever before, the Palestinian people needs the support and solidarity of the international community in this difficult transitional phase. That is why the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is firmly committed to stepping up its efforts to find a just and peaceful solution to the question. It will continue to seek to mobilize the international community at all levels, together with its faithful friends, the non-governmental organizations. The Committee also invites all present to contribute to the establishment of lasting peace and understanding among all the people of the region.

I now have the pleasure of calling upon the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko.

Mr. Udovenko (Ukraine), President of the General Assembly: Today the international community, in accordance with the decision adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977, is observing the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This occasion gives us an opportunity to express support for the Palestinian people as it strives to exercise its inalienable rights.

The decisions reached at the Madrid peace Conference and the Oslo Agreement were welcomed by the international community, as they advanced the achievement of the goal of establishing peace in the region, which might have seemed unattainable. The historic steps of the Israeli and Palestinian leaders in 1993, as we may recall, raised our hopes for a new era of peace, stability and prosperity for the peoples of the region. That new atmosphere provided the parties with good opportunities to overcome their differences through negotiations with respect to their mutual interests and concerns in order to establish a common foundation for peace.

Since then, we have witnessed some promising developments in the region. Regrettably, the recent deterioration of the situation has jeopardized the existing fragile balance and stability. There is a real danger that unreasonable unilateral decisions may lead to a deep crisis of confidence, which could result in a further erosion of the peace process. The consequent mistrust among the parties could destroy the very delicate structure of peace in the Middle East, which was so assiduously built up in recent years.

As the recent tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly demonstrated, the overwhelming majority of the United Nations Member States are convinced that progress in promoting confidence can and should be achieved on the basis of the agreements reached at the Madrid peace Conference and in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). The full implementation of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements that have already been signed — in particular, the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip of 28 September 1995 — should serve as a guarantee for further progress.

It is obvious that there is no alternative to the process of Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations based on the principles of mutual respect and confidence, adequate understanding by both sides of their respective interests, and their willingness to come to a reasonable compromise. Overcoming mistrust and suspicion, the cessation of provocative acts, the implementation in good faith of previously reached agreements and the early resumption of the peace talks aimed at a just and lasting solution of the problem of Palestine should therefore become imperatives at the current stage of Arab-Israeli relations. Additional measures should be taken to achieve normalization in these relations, the key element of which should be real progress on the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian tracks.

The international community should undertake all possible measures within the framework of the existing negotiation mechanism to contribute to the fullest extent possible to the aforementioned process. In this connection, the United Nations must play a more effective role, both as a guarantor of international legitimacy and as an important instrument in the mobilization and provision of international assistance.

The activities of agencies of the United Nations system aimed at providing assistance to the Palestinian people and support for the establishment of coordinating mechanisms to ensure the effective disbursement of donor funds also have a great significance. The promotion of stability in the region should assist the gradual integration of Palestinian autonomy into the economy of the Middle East region as a whole, which is an essential element of the integral peace efforts.

As the President of the General Assembly at it fifty-second session, I would like to reiterate the Assembly's position that the United Nations has a special responsibility regarding the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Peace must first be given a chance to take root if it is to flourish later, but it cannot be meaningful and durable unless the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully taken into account. This is a key to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I now have the honour and pleasure of calling on His Excellency the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan.

The Secretary-General: The annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

is an occasion to remember, to reflect and to renew our commitment.

Since the General Assembly decided on 29 November 1947 to partition Palestine, each of my predecessors has been deeply involved in the search for an equitable and peaceful settlement of this issue. They have also mobilized the resources of the entire United Nations family to provide humanitarian and development assistance. I pledge to continue these efforts.

This commemorative event provides an opportunity to remind the international community that the question of Palestine, which lies at the centre of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, remains unresolved despite the many efforts made over the years and the undeniable achievements of the peace process which began at Madrid in 1991.

With the signing of the historic Declaration of Principles on 13 September 1993 and subsequent agreements, which we refer to as the Oslo process, Israelis and Palestinians embarked on the road to mutual reconciliation and a negotiated peace. We must commend their courage.

It was also reassuring that earlier this year, after a lengthy delay, the Protocol concerning the Redeployment in Hebron was signed. It is now of utmost importance to prevent those achievements from dissipating and to build on them to fulfil the hopes of all the peoples of the region for a future of peace.

Regrettably, developments since then have sparked concern that the peace process is in jeopardy, compelling me to voice dismay at horrifying acts of violence against innocent victims. At the same time, I have appealed to the parties not to let themselves be swayed by these tragic incidents, but rather to intensify their efforts to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of a speedy return to the peace process.

I have called on the parties to take measures, in a spirit of partnership, to restore mutual confidence. I have called on them to resume negotiations in earnest towards implementation of the agreements already reached and towards a final settlement.

I am encouraged that the parties were able to resume their talks in Washington recently. I sincerely hope that, with the help and involvement of the sponsors of the peace process, they will be able to make progress on the outstanding issues. I hope that it will also become possible to resume talks on the other tracks of the Middle East peace process.

As public-opinion surveys and mass demonstrations have made absolutely clear, the vast majority of Palestinians and Israelis want a just peace that would enable them to live normally, side by side. It is essential to create the political and economic conditions that will enable this hope to become reality.

Recent events, as well as deliberations in the Security Council and the General Assembly, including its tenth emergency special session, have highlighted the fundamental importance of respect for the provisions of international law and of full implementation of the agreements already reached. Also apparent is the urgent need to make tangible progress towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The promotion of social and economic development and of cooperative relationships throughout the region is essential for the creation of an environment favourable to a lasting peace.

The United Nations continues to attach the utmost importance to improving the living conditions in the Palestinian territories as an essential accompaniment to the peace negotiations. In this regard, I have been seriously concerned at the steady economic decline in the West Bank and in Gaza, particularly in the light of prolonged closures and other punitive measures. We now need real progress in the fields of employment, health, education and development.

Enormous challenges remain. The deteriorating conditions on the ground have set back some of our efforts. I believe that the international community can, and must, go further.

In this context, the serious financial situation faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East must be addressed. This is essential for ensuring that the quality and level of services for Palestinian refugees can be maintained as an essential contribution to the stability of the region.

Today I wish to take this opportunity to renew the firm commitment of the United Nations system in support of the peace process. I should like to extend my thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this observance.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I would like to thank Mr. Kofi Annan, both for his encouraging words and for all his efforts to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. But I would also like particularly to thank the Secretary-General for his constant support for the work of the Committee.

I would like to allow the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Udovenko, to leave for a few minutes because he has to meet a Head of State. He will be with us again very shortly.

I now have the pleasure of calling on Mr. Fernando Berrocal Soto, President of the Security Council.

Mr. Berrocal Soto (Costa Rica), President of the Security Council (*interpretation from Spanish*): First of all, allow me to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the kind invitation it has extended to me, in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of December, to participate in this special meeting held to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

As President of the Security Council, I am pleased to be able to participate in this annual event in which the international community voices its solidarity with and support for the Palestinian people, as well as its unwavering commitment to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations.

The observance of this Day symbolizes solidarity with a people fighting for the exercise of its legitimate rights and is a reflection of the importance attached to the task of bringing about the long-awaited fulfilment of the resolution of the question of Palestine, which has been on the agenda of the United Nations since 1947.

The international community has been trying for 50 years to cut the Gordian knot of the question of Palestine. The Security Council fully recognizes that a solution to this problem is a key element of the efforts made to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the conflict between Arabs and Israelis within the framework of the Oslo accords. As everyone here knows, the Security Council's involvement with various aspects of the question of Palestine and its commitment to achieving a settlement in the Middle East goes back many years. In this context, it is appropriate to note that the peace process is founded on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The members of the Council have followed closely the peace process and the development of the situation in the region. Regrettably, the promising progress made at the beginning of the year with the conclusion of the Protocol concerning the Redeployment in Hebron and the Note for the Record degenerated into a stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. The greater part of the year was lost due to the disruptive actions that led to the discontinuation of the negotiations between the parties.

As we are aware, the parties resumed talks in Washington and in the region in October thanks to the mediation and assistance of the two sponsors of the peace process. The task of narrowing the differences separating the two sides is, however, demanding and laborious. However, the Security Council is hopeful that the parties will be in a position to restore the trust and mutual confidence vital to moving ahead in accordance with the agreements already reached.

Permit me to state clearly that the members of the Security Council are fully aware of the obstacles impeding the steady progress of the peace negotiations. That is why it calls upon the Israelis and the Palestinians to proceed with perseverance, flexibility and mutual understanding in their quest for reconciliation. The Council appreciates the constructive contribution of the international community to the overall efforts aimed at helping the parties to overcome the difficulties of the current phase.

As the Palestinian people are going through a difficult period of transition, they need a great deal of assistance in many aspects of their day-to-day life. In this regard, the Council warmly welcomes and would like further to encourage the multifaceted assistance extended to the Palestinian people by the international donor community. We also appreciate the continued assistance provided by the organizations, agencies and programmes of the United Nations system.

In conclusion, allow me to assure the Committee, on behalf of all members of the Security Council, that, guided by its responsibilities under the Charter, the Council will remain committed to the goal of attaining a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East for the benefit of all parties concerned, including the Palestinian people. This is particularly crucial today, as much has yet to be done in order to bring peace, stability and prosperity to the Middle East region.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr Nasser Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer of Palestine, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian National Authority.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I have the honour to read out the statement of His Excellency President Yasser Arafat, President of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and President of the Palestinian National Authority, on the occasion of the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People — 29 November 1997 — and addressed to this important and solemn meeting.

"First, I have the pleasure and the honour to convey to the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People the most sincere gratitude and deepest appreciation for their dedicated and constructive efforts in commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This event is marked each year as an expression of the continuing support of the international community and of its firm and principled commitment to the just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people to end the Israeli occupation of its land and its holy places and to resume the exercise of its inalienable national rights.

"It also gives me pleasure on this important Day to convey, on behalf of the Palestinian people and on my own behalf, our warmest greetings to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, together with our respect and appreciation for the dedicated efforts he is making to ensure the implementation of the resolutions of international legitimacy that ensure for the Palestinian people its right to self-determination and to the establishment of its independent state. I am also happy to convey our deep gratitude and appreciation to all friendly States and peoples and to all the freedom-, peace- and democracy-loving forces that believe in the just cause of the Palestinian people and in their just and legitimate struggle to be free and independent, like all the other peoples of the earth, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principles of international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the highest human values and principles.

"This commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity is truly a cause for pride and appreciation for the Palestinian people and for its leadership. In the difficult and delicate circumstances we are experiencing, that leadership looks with great hope and confidence for a redoubling of your worthy efforts, for your more active solidarity and for the continuation of your firm support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. That people has suffered much, and it is continuing to endure injustice, oppression and Israel's continued occupation of its land and holy places and its arbitrary and unjust practices, which in reality constitute a flagrant violation of all the relevant international instruments, covenants and resolutions.

"As the Committee is well aware, the peace process is facing a genuine crisis, and numerous obstacles are threatening to bring about a complete collapse of that process. This is because the present Israeli Government is continuing to pursue a policy of disregarding the agreements concluded with the Palestinian side, because it has failed to meet the obligations and the duties that these agreements entail and because it has rejected the terms of reference for the peace process on the basis of which the Madrid conference was convened. This is a policy of imposing diktats and *faits accomplis* and of the arrogance of power, as exemplified in the expropriation of Palestinian land and the construction of Israeli settlements on it; the demolition of homes; the building of bypass roads; the Judaization of the occupied Palestinian city of Jerusalem with a view to obliterating its Arab identity and its religious, historical and cultural status; and the attempts to isolate this Holy City from other Palestinian cities and to establish an alternative city to the city of Bethlehem, which is preparing to celebrate the two-thousandth anniversary of the birth of Christ. The continued pursuit of such a policy constitutes a grave defiance of and a rebellion against the will of the international community and threatens security and stability in the region.

"In the light of our commitment to the achievement of the desired peace — the peace of the brave, a balanced peace based on justice and equality — we appeal to all believers and to all those who are committed to the success of the peace process in the region, foremost among whom is the United Nations, to strive actively and to intervene forthwith to bring pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to

obey the will of the international community, the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Fourth Geneva Convention, and to force it to implement the obligations resulting from concluded agreements. Such obligations include, in particular, redeployment and withdrawal of the Israeli forces from all the occupied Palestinian areas and total abstention from unilateral actions, first and foremost the settlement activities. This would be preparation for the resumption of the negotiations on the final status, in an atmosphere of confidence and mutual respect, to find permanent and just solutions to the deferred fundamental matters on which the fate of the entire peace process and its future depend, foremost among which is the establishment of the Palestinian state.

"We adhere to the peace which the Palestinian people have chosen out of conviction and belief, and we strenuously defend it as an irreversible strategic choice, since the preservation of security and stability in the region and the opening of new horizons for coexistence and regional cooperation require, above all, the attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in this region. Peace is an international necessity and advantage to the same degree as it is a regional necessity and advantage. It is a matter which calls for intervention by the United Nations, as the Organization is the framework mandated to maintain international peace and security, in order to guarantee the implementation of the concluded agreements based on the decisions of international legitimacy, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and having the frame of reference of the Madrid Conference, which is embodied in the principle of land for peace.

"Given our lasting interest in participating actively and positively in all the activities of the United Nations and in those of its organs and specialized agencies, we hope for your assistance to and support for the just Palestinian quest that Palestine should be enabled to participate fully in the work of the Organization. Such full participation will strengthen the dedicated efforts we are making to establish and build a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East region, and it will give the Palestinian people confidence and hope for a promising future in which coming generations will live in security, peace, stability and prosperity without the afflictions caused by the wars and destruction that the peoples of the region, and primarily the Palestinian people, have endured for more than eight decades.

"In closing, we again convey to you all our best wishes and our deep appreciation, as we continue, as ever, to look to your active support and solidarity until such time as the Palestinian people is able to give concrete expression to the full meaning of its declaration of independence on the soil of its homeland, Palestine, and to live in freedom, security and dignity, sovereign and independent in its own country."

The message was signed by Yasser Arafat, President of the State of Palestine, Executive Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, President of the Palestinian National Authority, Gaza, 29 November 1997.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine, and ask him to convey the Committee's sincere thanks to His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, Executive Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority, for his inspiring message. I assure President Yasser Arafat and, through him, the Palestinian people of the firm determination of the Committee to continue and intensify its efforts within the framework of its mandate to contribute to the promotion of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine in order to enable the Palestinian people to exercise as soon as possible its inalienable national rights.

I shall now suspend the meeting to allow some of our invited guests to leave the Chamber. On behalf of the Committee, I should like once again to thank His Excellency the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency the Secretary-General, His Excellency the President of the Security Council and the representative of Palestine for having participated in the first part of our meeting.

The meeting was suspended at 11.55 a.m. and resumed at noon.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I call now on His Excellency Mr. Herman Leonard de Silva, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, to make a statement on behalf of the Special Committee.

Mr. De Silva (Sri Lanka), Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: On behalf of the Special

Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, and on my own account, I have the honour to convey to members this message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The signing at Washington, D.C., on 28 September 1995 of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip — the so-called Oslo II agreement — and the elections to the Palestine National Council and to the chairmanship of the Palestinian Authority on 21 January 1996 were historic events within the framework of the peace process in the Middle East. These were followed by the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the West Bank cities of Jenin, Tulkarem, Nablus, Qalqilya, Bethlehem and Ramallah, but not Hebron, that began in October 1995.

As was the case with the previous Washington and Cairo agreements of 1993 and 1994, the signing of the Oslo II accord engendered great expectations and hope among the population of the occupied territories and the international community that a new era of peace, security and hope for the people of the Middle East would be ushered in, enabling them to live in harmony, dignity and mutual respect. Unfortunately, the recent policies implemented by the recently elected Israeli Government and the developments leading to an unprecedented escalation of violence that have taken place in the occupied territories over the past few weeks have all but dashed the hopes of both the Palestinians and the international community regarding the continuation of the peace process.

The Government of Israel has continued to withhold its cooperation from the Special Committee, thereby persistently denying it access to the occupied territories covered by its mandate. This situation has not altered since the creation of the Special Committee in 1968.

In keeping with past practice, and given the constraints cited above, the Special Committee has nevertheless tried to depict the situation of human rights in the occupied territories in a faithful and comprehensive manner. Its findings are contained in the Special Committee's twenty-eighth report to the General Assembly.

In carrying out its mandate, the Special Committee has tried to assess whether the signing of the Oslo II agreement had any positive effects on the enjoyment of human rights by Palestinians and other Arabs in the occupied territories. On the basis of information it has received, the Committee has concluded that the human rights situation in the occupied territories has not improved, deteriorating even further deteriorated in numerous aspects, and remains a matter of very serious concern.

Among the principal causes of the deterioration of the human rights situation in the occupied territories has been the virtually hermetic closure since 25 February 1996 imposed in the wake of suicide bomb attacks in Israel, which amounts to collective punishment of the population. The closure has had disastrous consequences on the economy of the occupied territories and has led to a significant decline in economic and social conditions for the inhabitants.

For the first time, a total internal closure of the West Bank was implemented, locking its inhabitants inside. The closure has had particularly disastrous consequences for the health of the inhabitants of the occupied territories, and more than 10 persons have died as a result of not having access to well-equipped health institutions. It has also had serious negative effects on freedom of education and worship.

The Special Committee continued to pay particular attention to the situation of some 3,500 Palestinian prisoners in detention facilities within Israel in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. No new releases of prisoners, whose conditions of detention are reported to have deteriorated further, have taken place since January 1996. Since the imposition of the closure, Palestinian detainees have been cut off from their families and, in numerous cases, also from their lawyers.

The Special Committee is deeply concerned by the recent decision of the Israeli High Court of Justice to the use by the general security service of increased physical pressure, such as violent shaking, which may cause lethal brain haemorrhage or even death during interrogation of detainees and amounts to torture. It is particularly disquieting that interrogators enjoy immunity if the detainee dies.

The Special Committee has noted an increase in the number of house demolitions in East Jerusalem. There a community-centre building in the old part of the town was demolished on 27 August 1996. In addition, the new policy of restrictions regarding eligibility for residential status in Jerusalem has made the situation of its Arab population even more precarious.

The most disquieting new policy of the recently elected Israeli Government, and the one that poses the biggest threat to the peace process, is the decision to lift the freeze on the construction of settlements. It has been reported that the sum allocated for settlements in the Israeli Government's budget will be doubled in 1997. Tensions generated by the expansion of settlements and unabated construction of tunnels and bypass roads are further aggravated by the settlers' behaviour, which has even involved the killing of Palestinian children. Israeli law enforcement regarding settlers who commit offences has continued to be lenient.

The Special Committee has continued to monitor closely the situation in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan and is concerned about the most recent news concerning the construction of 900 new housing units there. The Special Committee chose to recall the position taken by the General Assembly and the Security Council that the annexation by Israel of the occupied Syrian Arab Golan is illegal, and therefore null and void, and hopes that the negotiations concerning the Golan within the Middle East process will be resumed in the near future.

The subject which of course causes the utmost concern and anxiety to the members of the Special Committee, however, is the unprecedented escalation of violence between the Israelis and Palestinians since the beginning of the peace process; this was caused by the opening by the Israeli authorities of the so-called Western Wall tunnel beneath the Temple Mount in the immediate vicinity of Islam's third holiest shrine. The excessive force used by the Israeli army to quell the protest demonstrations against the opening of the tunnel included the use of live ammunition fired from automatic weapons and from helicopter gunships and the involvement of snipers. A total of 60 Palestinians, including 10 children, and at least 15 Israelis were killed as a result of the clashes, and more than 1,000 persons were reported injured.

The Special Committee is of the opinion that it is vital that a dialogue between the parties be maintained and that the peace process continue. Deteriorating living conditions and the stalemate in the peace process could contribute to producing an environment conducive to further unrest. Both parties should respect the spirit and letter of the Oslo accords and ensure renewed commitment to the peace process through an immediate resumption of the peace talks. The frustration and despair of the Palestinians has further eroded their trust in the peace process. People feel bitterness and pain owing to the hunger and poverty which has ensued, and they fear Israeli excesses. The current lack of momentum in the peace process, which appears to have reached a stalemate, can only further erode people's trust that tangible progress can be achieved in the peace talks. Only a just peace can bring lasting peace to the region. All parties concerned must work together to safeguard the peace effort and develop confidence-building measures in order to maintain the momentum of the peace process.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank Mr. Herman Leonard de Silva for his statement and for the work done by his Committee.

I now call on Mr. Andelfo García, Deputy Permanent Representative and Chargé d'affaires of Colombia, who will read a message from His Excellency the President of Colombia in his capacity as Chairman of the Eleventh Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Mr. García (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I have the honour to read out the following message from the President of the Republic of Colombia, Mr. Ernesto Samper Pizano, in his capacity as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement on the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

> "As I said some months ago in the meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in the context of the anniversary of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, including Jerusalem, the Non-Aligned Movement, throughout its entire history, has maintained unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people and their legitimate aspiration to self-determination.
>
> "At this delicate juncture in the history of the Palestinian people, I wish to reiterate the vision of the Non-Aligned Movement with regard to this question, which has been a subject of permanent concern to us.
>
> "We regret that the atmosphere of agreement and trust so arduously achieved has deteriorated to a point where the possibilities for a lasting peace in the region are at risk.
>
> "We deplore the recent violent events in which innocent persons lost their lives, as well as subsequent events. The radical posture assumed by the Government of Israel, manifested in the taking of extreme measures such as, *inter alia*, the withholding

of taxes due to the Palestinian Authority, not only run counter to the spirit that should inform the peace process, but constitute a violation of the individual and collective rights of the Palestinian population.

"In order for trust between the parties to be restored, we believe that it is indispensable to maintain the recently resumed bilateral negotiations. The inescapable difficulties of the peace process can be overcome only to the extent that citizens of the region see tangible benefits throughout the process. However, only the total suspension by Israel of settlement activity in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, can restore the credibility and momentum that the process enjoyed in the past and that is now more necessary than ever if the difficult negotiations on permanent status are to be undertaken.

"The fact that the declaration regarding the question of Palestine adopted by the Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement at their Eleventh Conference held in Cartagena, remains fully valid demonstrates the degree of realism and understanding with which the Movement has been assessing the situation in the Middle East.

"At Cartagena we expressed our unqualified support for the legitimate struggle of the courageous Palestinian people to ensure respect for their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, and we reiterated our demand that Israel withdraw from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem.

"We also agreed that the responsibility of the United Nations in this area must continue until the attainment by the Palestinian people of the exercise of their inalienable right to self-determination, the establishment of an independent sovereign State in their national territory and the resolution of the problem of refugees, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

"We also regret Israel's decision to confiscate Palestinian property and land in Jerusalem and its attempts to modify the religious and historical character of the Holy City. In that connection, we endorse all Security Council and General Assembly resolutions concerning Jerusalem and consider null and void all actions by Israel running counter to those resolutions. We also urge the full and scrupulous implementation of the agreements, and in particular of the provisions of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), and underscore the need for the machinery established by the General Assembly relating to the question of Palestine to continue to function effectively.

"A short time ago, at the ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in New York, the Movement again saw a need, in the light of the deteriorating situation, to make a firm statement on this subject. The representatives of the non-aligned countries

> 'expressed their deep concern at the grave deterioration of the peace process in the Middle East and the increase in tension in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and throughout the region as a result of the policies and actions of the Government. They reaffirmed their position regarding the illegal settlements and other projects by Israel in the occupied territories. They supported the recommendation included in General Assembly resolution ES-10/3 of 15 July 1997 for the holding of a conference between the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention on measures to make the Convention applicable to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and to ensure its respect. They agreed that the participation of Israel in the work of the General Assembly should be in accordance with international law and that the participation of Palestine should reflect the important recent events in the Palestinian context.'

"The concern and commitment of the Non-Aligned Movement with regard to the situation of all of the occupied Arab territories and the search for peace in the Middle East are therefore constant. I wish to commend the leadership of the Movement and to express appreciation to its members for the solidarity they have shown with the Palestinian cause at the meetings of this year's emergency special session of the General Assembly. The position of the international community, and especially of the developing world, has been clearly set out in the reiteration of the need for the United Nations to continue actively to concern itself with the rights of the Palestinian people and peace in the region of the Middle East.

"We know the lasting consequences for international peace and security that may result from events relating to the peace process over the coming months, and I am therefore certain that the non-aligned countries will remain ready to lend their support, in keeping with the responsibility borne by the entire international community for the future of the Palestinian people.

"In conclusion, I should like to commend the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People."

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank Mr. Andelfo Garcia and request him to convey to His Excellency the President of Colombia the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important statement and message of support.

It is now my pleasure to give the floor to Mr. Makarim Wibisono, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Ali Alatas, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and Chairman of the twenty-fourth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): I have the honour to read out a message from Mr. Ali Alatas, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, in his capacity as Chairman of the twenty-fourth session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

"On this solemn occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it is my distinct honour, as Chairman of the twenty-fourth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, to reaffirm our unequivocal support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle for freedom, justice and the right to determine their own destiny and to establish an independent State in their own homeland, with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital.

"Ever since the inception of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) nearly three decades ago, it has accorded paramount importance to the issue of Palestine on its agenda. Member States of the OIC have consistently played an active role in the international endeavour to redress the grave injustice and hardship inflicted on the Palestinian people as they carried out their heroic struggle. We in the OIC therefore deeply appreciate the invaluable role of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in the effort to generate worldwide awareness of the plight of the Palestinian people and mobilize international public opinion in support of their valiant struggle.

"For more than half a century now, the Palestinian people have waged this struggle. For the same length of time, the OIC has constantly affirmed that the cause of this struggle is sacred to all Muslims and reiterated its total solidarity with the Palestinian people in this unremitting quest. From the outset, the OIC has consistently called for the full implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and for the universal recognition of the principle of land for peace, on which peace in the Middle East is hinged.

"In spite of positive and hope-inspiring developments earlier during this decade, such as the signing of the 1993 Declaration of Principles and subsequent agreements, the triumphant return of President Yasser Arafat to the Gaza Strip and the election of representatives to the Palestinian National Council, peace remains elusive in the Middle East. For the past two years, the peace process has been paralysed as Israel reneged on its commitments to agreements already reached and subjected the Palestinian people to such provocative measures as arbitrary arrests and detention, confiscation and demolition of Palestinian properties and prolonged border closures. Particularly reprehensible is the escalation of construction of illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Arab lands, including in and around Jebel Abu Ghneim. This brazen attempt to alter the demographic composition of the occupied territories has been condemned by the international community as a flagrant violation of the 1993 Declaration of Principles and subsequent agreements, as well as a travesty of relevant United Nations resolutions, the Fourth Geneva Convention and provisions of various international laws. Israel's acts of oppression and provocation have inflicted great suffering on the people living in the occupied territories and stymied efforts to resume the peace negotiations.

"We observe this Day with undiminished hope, but also with indignation and dismay at the challenges and obstructions that the Israeli authorities have placed on the road to peace. Indeed, the OIC is deeply concerned at the tensions that pervade the Middle East today. The twenty-fourth session of the Islamic

Conference of Foreign Ministers, held in Jakarta in December 1996, the extraordinary session of the Islamic Summit in Islamabad on 23 March 1997, the ministerial meeting of the Al-Quds Committee in Rabat on 27 March 1997, and the Annual Coordination Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the OIC at United Nations Headquarters on 2 October 1997 all emphasized that Israel must be prevailed upon to fully comply with its commitments and obligations under agreements already reached in order to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region.

"The question of Palestine has been on the agenda of the United Nations for nearly five decades. Its persistence is a searing wound to the world Organization, for it means that a cardinal principle enshrined in its Charter remains unimplemented. It cannot be denied that the United Nations bears a historic responsibility to secure a comprehensive and just solution to this difficult and complex problem. At stake is not only the future of a nation and people but also our shared vision of a world of peace, social justice and equitable prosperity. That vision can never be realized so long as a regime of oppression, provocation and poverty threatens the stability of one of the world's most strategic regions. But enduring peace can be achieved in the region if all the parties concerned would honour their commitments and faithfully implement the provisions of agreements already reached. In this regard, we pay tribute to the Palestinian people and their leaders for their courage and determination, despite setbacks to the peace process and the suffering inflicted upon them, to persevere in their pursuit of peace and national development.

"For the Palestinians know only too well that peace without social and economic development cannot endure. The economic infrastructures of the occupied territories, devastated by decades of oppression and tension, must therefore be rebuilt and the Palestinians must be assisted in getting back on the road to development. The United Nations must lead in providing them the necessary support in their endeavour to rebuild their economy and their lives. It is also imperative that the international community marshal and deliver vital development assistance to the Palestinians.

"On the part of the OIC, we shall remain steadfast in our commitment to contribute all we can to the realization of the aspirations of the Palestinian people to freedom, justice and the exercise of all their inalienable rights, as well as to peace and development. On this solemn occasion, we reaffirm and renew that commitment."

The Chairman *(interpretation from French)*: I thank Ambassador Mr. Makarim Wibisono and request him to be kind enough to convey to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia the sincere thanks of the Committee for his message.

It is now my pleasure to give the floor to Mr. Machivenyika Tobias Mapuranga, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zimbabwe, who will read out a message from His Excellency the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, in his capacity as Chairman of the Organization of African Unity.

Mr. Mapuranga (Zimbabwe): I have the honour to read out to this gathering the message of Mr. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People:

"On this solemn but auspicious occasion to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to reaffirm Zimbabwe's strong commitment and unwavering support to the Palestinian people in the attainment of all their inalienable rights to exercise self-determination and to establish an independent State.

"Since the beginning of the Madrid peace process in 1991, the world has witnessed encouraging developments in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. While there has been some progress on the political front, the situation on the ground is far from satisfactory. In fact, economic and social conditions have deteriorated. The restrictions on the freedom of movement imposed by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the continued construction of illegal settlements by Israel on occupied Arab territories have exacerbated the economic hardship of the Palestinians living in those areas. The continuation of such irresponsible acts will strike a mortal blow to the peace process.

"While recognizing that the peace process is fraught with difficulties, the Organization of African Unity believes that the successful progression of the peace process depends on the commitment and

willingness of the parties concerned to implement scrupulously all provisions of agreements freely entered into.

"Extremism and recourse to terror tactics designed to derail the peace process must be resolutely rejected. The OAU is confident that the leadership of President Yasser Arafat will lead the Palestinians to a just and successful conclusion in their endeavour to establish an independent Palestinian State.

"The OAU, as well as the Government and the people of Zimbabwe, are happy to extend to the Committee and, through the Committee, to the Palestinian people their solidarity and best wishes on this landmark Day."

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank Mr. Machivenyika Tobias Mapuranga, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zimbabwe, and I would ask him to convey to His Excellency the President of Zimbabwe, the current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity, the respects and sincere thanks of the Committee for his message.

I would now like to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Said Kamal, Under-Secretary-General for Palestine Affairs of the League of Arab States, who will read out a message from Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdul-Maguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Kamal (League of Arab States) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I am pleased to address the Committee today on behalf of Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdul-Maguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, who sends his greetings and appreciation to the Committee and to the States and organizations represented here for all the meritorious efforts they have made on the question of Palestine and just causes around the world. It is a great honour for me to participate on his behalf in this solemn United Nations meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

"We cherish this occasion as a symbol of the commitment of the international community to stand by the Palestinian people for the exercise of their national, inalienable and legitimate rights. On this day, half a century ago, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), providing for the partitioning of Palestine into two States, an Arab State and a Jewish State. However, the setback of 1948 that resulted in the establishment of Israel also deprived the Palestinian people of their right to an independent State after they had lost two thirds of their territory and transformed the majority of Palestinians into refugees in exile. This was followed by the deletion of the question of Palestine from the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly and its replacement by the question of Palestinian refugees.

"However, the steadfast Palestinian people never lost their faith in the justice of their cause. They continued their struggle and sacrifices until the General Assembly, at its twenty-eighth session, decided in November 1974 to include the question of Palestine once more on its agenda and invited President Yasser Arafat to present the question of Palestine to the Assembly. The Assembly then adopted a resolution granting the Palestine Liberation Organization observer status in the United Nations and its specialized agencies. It also adopted a resolution confirming the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people — rights that the Assembly has spared no effort to implement.

"Every year, on this Day, we meet here to demonstrate our solidarity with the Palestinian people on the anniversary of the partition resolution and to express the world's support for the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. On this occasion last year, I undertook many contacts with officials of the United Nations, whereby many aspects of cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States were considered, with the aim of supporting the efforts of the Palestinian people to regain their rights and to establish their independent State on their national territory. One of the most important aspects of this cooperation is reflected in the preparation for convening the international conference in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, to be held under the auspices of this Committee, in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

"Last August at the United Nations in Geneva, I met with delegations representing the Committee, headed by Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, the United Nations Division for Palestinian Rights, the OIC, the representative and Observer of Palestine at the United Nations and the delegation of the League of Arab States, which I had the honour to head. Preparations for holding the conference in Brussels were considered, as it is the capital of the European Union.

The conference will take place on 23 and 24 February 1998.

"During their participation in the opening of this session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and the Secretary-General of the OIC held a meeting which ended with the issuance of a joint statement expressing their agreement to exert the necessary efforts to guarantee the success of the conference. They undertook contacts with Ambassador Ka, after which the Arab Foreign Ministers who took part in the session held a meeting attended by the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, where it was decided to express appreciation for the complete coordination between the United Nations, the Arab League and the OIC with the purpose of making the conference a success.

"It is expected that President Yasser Arafat will participate in this conference, as well as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, and the Secretaries-General of the Arab League and of the OIC, in addition to representatives of the sponsors of the peace process in the Middle East. It will also be attended by prominent Arab, Islamic, and international personalities, and Arab and non-Arab scholars and experts, who will present expert papers on the subject of the conference.

"Among the other constructive efforts made by this Committee is the meeting held at the United Nations in Geneva for European non-governmental organizations. I had the honour to represent the Arab League at that meeting and to present to the participants the position of the Arab League concerning the peace process, and the keen interest of the Arab States in the success of this process, despite the current intransigent and negative Israeli policies.

"The meeting represented an occasion to underline the importance of the role of these organizations in the service of peace and international stability, as well as in the enhancement of public awareness of the question of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Here we have to recognize the cooperation between the League of Arab States and United Nations specialized agencies which cover, in addition to the political aspects of the question of Palestine, joint efforts for supporting the development, reconstruction and establishment of Palestinian institutions, such as workshops for cadres for the Palestinian National Authority. This was accomplished in cooperation with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research. These joint efforts also included the establishment of a fund to support Palestinian higher education in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

"On this occasion, while inviting all international and regional institutions to intensify this kind of cooperation, I cannot fail to thank all those who have participated with us in the effort to help the Palestinian people build their institutions and their independent State. It is an effort that ultimately serves the noble goals of the United Nations in the service of development, stability and peace for all the peoples of the world."

The League of Arab States took the initiative of supporting the peace process even before the Madrid Conference in October 1991. Its Council, in September of that year, adopted a resolution welcoming the efforts aimed at establishing a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East and supporting the Arab countries directly concerned with the negotiations.

After the Oslo agreement was signed in September 1993, the League of Arab States, during its session that same September, regarded that agreement as a first important measure towards the realization of the principle of land for peace and decided that this should be complemented by urgent steps on all tracks. On the basis of the Arabs' belief that peace is a strategic option, the League of Arab States continued to support the peace process. Real progress would have been achieved in this process, as was hoped, if not for the Israeli policies of the Likud Party, headed by Benjamin Netanyahu.

After the declaration by Mr. Netanyahu of his election campaign programme, it became crystal clear that he was not enthusiastic about the peace process and that he opposed all the bases on which it was launched. It was believed in the beginning that these were mere election campaign positions which would later change in consonance with the Arab and international orientation towards the establishment of a comprehensive and just peace. However, the Netanyahu Administration's policies, since it came to power, remain the same. In fact, the intransigence of these policies increases day after day. This is represented by the evasion of commitments made to the Palestinian Liberation

Organization by the Labour Government, prevarication in negotiations and, in fact, attempts to undermine them, as is being done on the Palestinian track, or to freeze them, as in the case of the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. There are also the continuation of the settlement policy, the confiscation of land, the imposition of economic blockades and the communal punishment meted out to the Palestinian people.

It is no secret that the present Administration of Israel applies a policy that is destructive to the peace process, thus flouting the rights of the Arab and the Palestinian peoples, as called for by the United Nations, and also flouting all principles of international legitimacy stipulating the right of peoples, including the Palestinian people, to self-determination and sovereignty over their resources.

Confronting the present Israeli policy calls for joining the efforts of the international community, through the United Nations, and special efforts of the sponsors of the peace process, the European Union and China in order to stop these Israeli policies and restore the peace process to its proper track so that a just and comprehensive peace can be achieved in the Middle East.

In view of this situation, as the Committee may recall, the Council of the League of Arab States adopted a resolution last September in consonance with the resolution of the last Arab Summit, which called, *inter alia*, for the cessation of the measures for normalization with Israel within the framework of the peace process until Israel implemented the agreements reached with the Arab parties on all tracks and until it complied with the Madrid frame of reference.

At the same time, the Council of the League welcomed the position of the United States of America, which crystallized during the last visit by Mrs. Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State of the United States, to the area. The Council decided, by consensus, to cooperate with the policy of the United States and to build on that positive policy, which confirms the principle of land for peace and the commitment to refrain from unilateral actions that could undermine the negotiations on the permanent status.

As we understand it, the position of the United States is based on the following. First, the United States Administration has recognized that there is a lack of trust between the parties, though the Administration has not decided how to restore that trust. Secondly, Secretary Albright is honest and committed and has the ability to deal with the American Congress. Thirdly, the time element is important in bridging the gap between the parties concerned in the peace process so that a major breakthrough can be achieved, because movement is slow at present. Fourthly, the United States does not accept — in fact, it rejects — the replacement of one track by another. Fifthly, the impression in the United States is that the gap between the Israeli Administration and the Israeli people is widening every day. In particular, there is a sense in the United States and internationally that Prime Minister Netanyahu makes promises that he does not keep. Finally, the United States will conduct a strategic dialogue with the parties concerned in the area on all questions in the entire area, in order to include more than the Israeli Palestinian track.

At the international level, we are waiting for the results of moves and contacts undertaken by the United States of America and the efforts of the European Union and the Russian Federation, which we hope will put an end to the deadlock in the peace process which has been caused by the Israeli policy. There is an ever increasing fear of the possible failure of these efforts and of the possible success of the Israeli Prime Minister in finishing off the peace process and embroiling the area in a state of no war and no peace. In our view, this would be a serious situation, which we hope would not last for too long before dissipating in the face of international enthusiasm for peace and Arab hopes for that peace.

It is a serious situation, as it would provide an atmosphere conducive to both individual and collective violence, not only against Israel, but possibly extending to the interests of many others including all the symbols of peace. Behind this clear message to the international community and the Israeli community is the Arab interest in peace, so that all may work with all seriousness and wisdom to avoid this option. The Israeli Government alone bears the responsibility for undermining the peace process, which would compromise the interests of all peoples of the area, first and foremost the Israeli people. Nevertheless, I hope that the efforts of this Committee to achieve peace will succeed.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank Mr. Said Kamal and ask that he be kind enough to convey to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States the sincere thanks of the Committee for his message, and especially for his determination to make the Brussels conference in support of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people a real success.

I now call on Mr. Don Betz, Chairman of the International Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine.

Mr. Betz (International Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine): As Chairman of the International Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine (ICCP), I am indeed honoured to be here on this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I am privileged to represent the thousands of men and women around the globe who network with one another via a multiplicity of international organizations on the question of Palestine. We are known as non-governmental organizations.

This year, 1997, has been memorable for the series of important anniversaries in the continuing story of the question of Palestine. Indeed, some of those have been noted here today. But 1997 is also significant for the non-governmental organizations involved in the search for a just peace in the Middle East, for it is the fifteenth year of active collaboration between the United Nations and the network of non-governmental organizations on Palestine. Since 1983 there have been 15 annual international meetings, held either in Geneva or at the United Nations Centre in Vienna, and a greater number of regional symposiums of non-governmental organizations. The initial meeting of non-governmental organizations in 1983 was a parallel activity to the historic International Conference on the Question of Palestine, where 137 Member States gathered together in Geneva. At that same time, 104 non-governmental organizations, including 10 organizations from the State of Israel, were curious enough to attend. I have had the opportunity to participate in every one of those annual meetings and to chronicle the evolving relationship between the United Nations and the emerging network of non-governmental organizations on this issue.

The world's attention to the status of the Palestinian people has waxed and waned over the past half century since the partition of Palestine. But one constant has been the focused attention on Palestine by non-governmental organizations. Since 1984 the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights have made United Nations-non-governmental-organization relations an integral part of their programme of work in several ways, including cooperation with the ICCP and regional non-governmental-organization coordinating bodies. For this, we are truly grateful. For 15 years non-governmental organizations in the network have accepted the full implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions as their common platform. True to their adopted course, non-governmental organizations are persistent in reminding the United Nations and its Member States of their collective responsibility to fulfil United Nations resolutions on Palestine, including General Assembly resolution 181 (II).

As the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, we must help tell the story of the last 50 years as seen and experienced through the eyes and hearts of the Palestinian people. In this fiftieth year it must be told more effectively and more passionately than ever before. Actions must be coordinated and well publicized. We must target wider audiences in many countries. Most people alive today were born after 1947 and have no historical context in which to make an accurate assessment of the significance and truthfulness of the avalanche of expertly prepared programming to which they are exposed. We must work collectively to offer the public, particularly in the United States and Europe, another version of the history they presume to know so well.

From the smallest non-governmental organization with a few dedicated members diligently working in a single community to the massive international non-governmental organizations with affiliates in dozens of countries, non-governmental organizations are finding fresh and creative ways to communicate the story of the Palestinian people. As non-governmental organizations, we urge closer cooperation between us and the United Nations to produce, disseminate and present updated videos and literature that present the question of Palestine to the first-time viewer or reader. During the coming months, every person with access to a television set, a radio, a newspaper, a magazine or a computer should encounter the story of Palestine and the Palestinian people. Any hope or confidence we can expect to have in alteration of the status quo must be connected to our enduring and effective involvement in what we do every day and every week.

As non-governmental organizations, we have a broad range of talents and resources which we can utilize. We represent the scope and richness of cultures, tradition, historical experience and commitment to human rights and development. Taken together and acting in coordination, non-governmental organizations world wide are acknowledged as an emerging force in the changing landscape of international politics. Networks of non-governmental organizations are enhanced by access to new technologies and connect people to one another across national borders and wide oceans. Over the past 15 years we have focused considerable energy and public attention

on the obstacles to the realization of a genuine peace in the Middle East. Each person or individual organization is an essential part of the broader, popular, global movement supporting the Palestinians and their fundamental rights as persons and as a people.

In 1982 the United Nations and the non-governmental organizations actively supporting the rights of the Palestinians initiated their historic cooperation. It was done to achieve a common objective, a just and lasting peace in the Middle East with Palestinian self-determination at its core and with action firmly rooted in United Nations resolutions.

We must remind our Governments and friends — and ourselves — that this intractable situation known on the United Nations agenda for decades as "Question of Palestine" has always been about control and freedom, about security and self-determination, about independence and creating facts on the ground. The issues directly relate to power, control, freedom and justice. The non-governmental organizations have articulated the issues and the sources of conflict for a variety of constituencies, both governmental and non-governmental, for many years.

The non-governmental-organization facility for communication has been one of our enduring and effective assets. We have always believed that an informed international public would not accept the premise of injustice that has been part of the question of Palestine. Rather, we look to our organizations and others, in concert with selected Governments, to motivate people in their countries to work for peace with justice. Our relationship with the United Nations is significant to the extent that our combined efforts and energies help foster desired change.

We can state with confidence that non-governmental organizations have worked many years on this issue because of their unshakeable belief in justice and their sense of identity with the Palestinian people. We are linked by human bonds of empathy. The extended closings of the West Bank and Gaza with the resulting disastrous economic consequences, the progressive isolation of Palestinians from access to Jerusalem, the establishment and expansion of settlements, the denial of access to refugees and the endless incarceration of prisoners, among other issues, have indelibly marked our hearts and stirred our collective sense of determination to persist in this work.

As non-governmental organizations, our commitment means that we never stop articulating the story of Palestine, never stop reminding our fellow citizens, our Governments and ourselves that this work is not over until peace with justice, rooted in self-determination, prevails in Palestine and throughout the region. We must be focused on the outcome — the fullest expression of political, economic and social independence for the Palestinian people — in order to assess the efficacy and the relevance of our words, our deeds, our programmes and our solemn meetings.

Non-governmental organizations demonstrate in a practical and human way the powerful, indivisible bonds that connect people to the hopes and realities of others. All calls for the realization of human rights and creative cooperation may mean little if they are not rooted in deep appreciation of the value of each person and in clear recognition of each person's right to be a participant in shaping the future. Non-governmental organizations, whether focused on human rights or on development, know this, and this clarity of purpose is one reason why non-governmental organizations constitute a dynamic and serious force in international affairs.

It is said that hope can be exceptionally fragile or amazingly durable. It depends on the perception of living those aspirations in some reasonable time. Those in Palestine who live, hope and work for self-determination and unfettered independence draw on their sense of unity and possibility as a nation. We, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations, must be part of the active support system for these people.

And we, as non-governmental organizations, as unique members of the international community, fully embrace our responsibilities and vow never to be idle or dispassionate or silent.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I thank Mr. Don Betz for his statement and for the valuable contribution that non-governmental organizations, under his dynamic and inventive leadership, have always made to the work of the Committee.

I now have the honour to announce that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has received messages of support and solidarity from many Heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations. The texts of the messages will be published in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights, but I would like to read out the list of names of those who have sent them.

We have received messages from the following Heads of State: His Excellency Mr. Nelson Mandela, President of

the Republic of South Africa; His Majesty Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Sultan and Yang di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam; His Excellency Mr. Soeharto, President of the Republic of Indonesia; His Excellency Mr. Nouhak Phoumsavanh, President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic; and His Excellency Mr. Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic of Senegal.

I would like to note the presence here of Mr. Jacques Baudin, Minister of Justice of Senegal, who has brought his country's message from Dakar this morning. I thank him for joining us.

We have also received messages from the following Heads of State: His Excellency Mr. Duc Luong, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam; Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; His Excellency Mr. Glafcos Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus; His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt; His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates; His Majesty King Hussein Ibn Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; His Excellency Mr. Liamine Zeroual, President of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria; His Excellency Mr. Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation; His Excellency Le Général de Brigade Lansana Conte, President of the Republic of Guinea; His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia; His Excellency Lieutenant-General Omer Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir, President of the Republic of the Sudan; His Excellency Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, President of the Islamic State of Afghanistan; His Excellency Mr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia; His Majesty King Fahd Bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques; His Excellency Mr. Seyed Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran; and His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar.

We have also received messages from the following Heads of Government: His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; His Excellency Mr. Chuan Leekpai, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand; His Excellency Mr. Li Peng, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China; His Excellency Dr. Alfred Sant, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta; His Excellency Mr. Inder Kumar Gujral, Prime Minister of the Republic of India; Her Excellency Ms. Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; His Excellency Mr. Mesut Yilmaz, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey; His Excellency Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius.

The following Ministers of Foreign Affairs have sent messages: His Excellency Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic; His Excellency Professor S. Jayakumar, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Singapore; His Excellency Mr. Luiz Felipe Palmeira Lampreia, Minister of External Relations of the Federative Republic of Brazil; His Excellency Mr. Keizo Obuchi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan; His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine; and His Excellency Mr. Chong Ha Yoo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea.

The Governments of Argentina, Uruguay, Malaysia and Guyana have also sent messages.

We have also received messages from representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations: His Excellency Mr. Jacques Poos, President of the Council of Ministers of the European Union, and His Excellency Mr. Azzedine Laraki, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

From specialized agencies, we have received a message from Mr. Federico Mayor, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

We have received messages from the following non-governmental organizations: the Israeli Cultural Association of Córdoba; the Association for Analysis of Society and Political Education; Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region; African Committee of the World Peace Council; the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue; the Latin American and the Caribbean Confederation of YMCAs; the Palestinian Network in Sweden; and the Indo-Palestinian Solidarity Organization.

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People as a whole, I should like to express our sincere appreciation to the Heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations I have just mentioned, as well as to all participants for their unceasing efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and for the steadfast support they have always given to the objectives and activities of the Committee.

The statements we have heard and the messages of solidarity we have received today demonstrate once again the determination of the international community to progress towards the establishment of peace in the Middle East through the attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with United Nations resolutions and international law. I can assure everyone here that all the members of the Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people will spare no effort to achieve these objectives.

I now have the pleasure and honour of calling on His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine Liberation Organization) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At the closing of this solemn meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it gives me great pleasure to express my thanks and appreciation to all the Heads of State or Government, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and all the friends who kindly sent messages of solidarity to this Committee, reiterating their support for the rights of the Palestinian people. We would also like to express our thanks to the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council for their attendance and their statements of solidarity.

This broad international participation shows clearly that the United Nations supports the Palestinian people in their relentless struggle to restore their inalienable rights, return to their home and establish their own independent State.

We deeply appreciate the continued efforts made by Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, as well as the efforts made by the members of the Committee both in supporting the Palestinian question and in attracting more friends to this just cause and to the struggle of the Palestinian people to establish a lasting and just peace.

We would like to thank Mr. Herman Leonard de Silva for his report on the Israeli practices in the Arab territories.

We are fully confident that all these noteworthy international efforts will not be in vain and that, indeed, they will lead to the establishment of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East region. They will inevitably help the Palestinian people to recover its inalienable national rights and its right to self-determination.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I wish to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has made this meeting possible, in particular the members of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Office of Conference Services, the Department of Public Information and the security officers and everyone else who works behind the scenes.

I want to remind everyone that the exhibit arranged by the office of the Permanent Observer of Palestine, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, will be opened today at 6 p.m. in the public lobby of the General Assembly building, and that the ceremony will be followed by a reception to which all are cordially invited.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.